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Department of State

OUTGOING TELEGRAM

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E.O. 12065: N/A

TAGS: SOPN

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT PRESS BRIEFING JUNE 12, 1981

FOR ADDRESSEE POSTS' INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE, FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM DEPARTMENT PRESS BRIEFING TODAY. SPOKESMAN WAS DAVID PASSAGE.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY REACTION TO THE ARAB LEAGUE ACTION OF YESTERDAY?

A. I DON'T HAVE ANY REACTION, PROPERLY DEFINED. I THINK WE'LL WAIT FOR THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE TO TAKE PLACE THEY'RE BEGINNING THEIR CONSIDERATION THIS AFTERNOON. WE'V NOTED THE ARAB LEAGUE RESOLUTION.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY JC DATE 9/20/98
RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
DECLASSIFIED☐ RELEASABLE☒
RELEASE DENIED☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

OUR POSITION ON THE VARIOUS POINTS THAT THEY'VE MADE WILL BE STATED IN THE COURSE OF THE DEBATE AT THE UN.

Q. DOES THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAVE ANY EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S CONTENTION THAT AN UNDERGROUND BOMB FACTORY WAS DESTROYED IN ADDITION TO THE REACTOR?

A. WE'RE HAVING SOME EXCHANGES WITH THE ISRAELIS IN THE CONTEXT OF LOOKING INTO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE ISRAELI ACTION. I DON'T HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT THAT. I NOTE THAT THERE HAS BEEN AT LEAST ONE CORRECTION COME OUT OF ISRAEL ON THAT IN THE LAST 24 HOURS, AND THAT'S THE ERROR ABOUT THE DEPTH OF THIS FACILITY; BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT EITHER THE FACILITY OR ANYTHING ELSE.

Q. CAN YOU TELL ME HOW MUCH WE KNEW ABOUT THE LEVEL OF ISRAELI DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRESS ON THAT NUCLEAR PLANT?

HAVE THEY TOLD US REPEATEDLY, "WE'RE REALLY CONCERNED ABOUT THIS AND WE'RE GOING TO DO SOMETHING IF YOU DON'T BEGIN TO NEGOTIATE,", OR WAS IT REALLY A TOTAL SURPRISE TO US?

A. AS WE SAID AT THE TIME, WE HAD NO FOREKNOWLEDGE OF ALL OF THE ISRAELI PLANS FOR A RAID. WITH RESPECT TO DISCUSSIONS THAT WE HAVE HAD OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS WITH THEM AND WITH OTHERS, I WOULD NOT BE IN A POSITION TO GO INTO THAT.

THEY HAVE EXPRESSED ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS IN THE PAST THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION IN THE AREA AND SO HAVE WE. I WOULD NOT LINK THE TWO NECESSARILY FOR THIS PURPOSE.

DO WE BELIEVE THAT ISRAEL HAD EXHAUSTED THE DIPLOMATIC ROUTE?

A. I DO NOT KNOW WHAT DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS THEY MAY HAVE MADE. I WOULD NOT BE SPEAKING TO THEM IN ANY EVENT.

WITH RESPECT TO DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS IN GENERAL, WE'VE SAID WHAT WE HAD TO SAY ABOUT THE RAID. I THINK I WOULD HAVE TO LET IT GO AT THAT.

Q. WAS THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IN CONTACT WITH THE MITTERAND GOVERNMENT AND DID IT MAKE ANY EFFORT TO DELAY THE SHIPMENT OF FUEL?

Q. YOU'D HAVE TO ASK EITHER THE ISRAELI OR THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT ABOUT THAT. I WOULD NOT ANSWER THE QUESTION EVEN IF I KNEW.

Q. THE FRENCH SAY NO.

A. I WON'T SAY.

Q. WHY THE ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING THE SECURITY ADVISER AND THE SECRETARIES OF STATE AND DEFENSE?

A. SIMPLY BECAUSE THERE HAD BEEN A QUESTION RAISED AS A CONSEQUENCE OF VARIOUS NEWS REPORTS LAST EVENING ABOUT DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION, WE THOUGHT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO POINT OUT TWO THINGS: FIRST, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, IT'S THE PRESIDENT WHO MAKES POLICY NOT ANY INDIVIDUAL ENTITY WITHIN GOVERNMENT; AND

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SECONDLY, THAT THERE WAS A UNIFIED RECOMMENDATION THAT WAS PUT TO THE PRESIDENT, AND THAT SEEMS TO US TO BE IMPORTANT, RATHER THAN WHETHER OR NOT THERE WERE DIFFERENCES IN APPROACH BETWEEN DIFFERENT AGENCIES.

Q. DO YOU REGARD THE BEGIN STATEMENT AS A LEGITIMATE COMMENT ON THE INTERNAL WORKINGS OF THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT, OR AN INTERFERENCE, OR AN ATTEMPT TO INFLUENCE POLICY?

A. I DON'T HAVE ANY COMMENT ON THE STATEMENT.

Q. WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE SAUDI ARABIA TRANSFER OF 70 TANKS TO THE SUDAN?

A. I UNDERSTAND THERE WAS AN ASSERTION IN ONE OF THE NEWSPAPER STORIES THIS MORNING THAT THE SAUDIS HAD TRANSFERRED TANKS OF U.S. ORIGIN TO THE SUDAN, THE IMPLICATION BEING THAT THEY HAD NOT COMPLETED WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE ARMS EXPORT CONTROL ACT.

I DO KNOW THAT THE SAUDIS HAD DISCUSSED THE MATTER WITH US AND THAT WE NOT ONLY GAVE OUR APPROVAL OF THE TRANSFER OF THE EQUIPMENT--THIS IS SOMETIME AGO--BUT THAT WE ENCOURAGED THEM TO DO SO. THIS WAS DONE WITH OUR FULL APPROVAL AND FOREKNOWLEDGE.

I UNDERSTAND THAT WE HAVE NOW NOTIFIED THE CONGRESS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE LAW. THERE MAY HAV BEEN A TECHNICAL BUREAUCRATIC LAPSE SOMEWHERE, BUT CERTAINLY IN A POLICY SENSE THE SAUDIS SOUGHT AND OBTAINED NOT ONLY APPROVAL BUT ENCOURAGEMENT.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THE SUDAN WANTS TO DO WITH 70 AMERICAN TANKS?

A. THE ANSWER TO THAT;QUESTION PROBACLY OUGHT TO COME FROM THE SUDANESE GOVERNMENT. LET'S JUST SAY THAT IT WAS AN EQUIPMENT REQUEST THAT WE HAD NO DIFFICULTY WITH. I'LL GUESS THAT THEY PROBABLY WANTED TO MODERNIZE THEIR ARMOR FOR SELF-DEFENSE PURPOSES, BUT

WE CERTAINLY HAD NO DIFFICULTY WITH THEIR REQUEST.

Q. HAD THE US LODGED A PROTEST WITH THE SOVIET UNION CONCERNING CERTAIN SOVIET STATEMENTS REGARDING THE ISRAELI RAID, INCLUDING THE ALLEGATIONS THAT THE US DID IN FACT HAVE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THE RAID, ADMINISTRATION DENIALS WITHSTANDING?

A. WE HAVE HAD SOME EXCHANGES WITH THE SOVIET UNION AT THE OFFICIAL LEVEL. I WOULDN'T WANT TO GO INTO THEM. WITH RESPECT TO THE CHARGES THAT I THINK YOU'RE PROBABLY REFERRING TO, I WOULD SIMPLY DESCRIBE THEM AS FALSE AND MALICIOUS.

Q. YOU SAID ON THE RAID YOU HAD NO FOREKNOWLEDGE ON THE TIMING OR THE RAID ITSELF?

A. ANY ELEMENT OF IT.

Q. WELL, HOW COME SOME OFFICIALS AT THE PENTAGON SAID WE HAD KNOWN ABOUT THE RAID BUT THAT WE'RE SURPRISED AT THE TIMING?

A. I AM NOT AWARE OF ANY OFFICIALS AT THE PENTAGON HAVING SAID THEY HAD KNOWN IN ADVANCE ABOUT THE RAID. I WILL REPEAT CATEGORICALLY THAT NO US GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL HAD ANY FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THAT RAID.

Q. CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW THE REVIEW OF THE RAID IS BEING CONDUCTED HERE? DO YOU HAVE COMMITTEE SET UP? IS IT AN INTERAGENCY GROUP.?

A. THERE IS AN INTERAGENCY GROUP THAT'S PUTTING TOGETHER A RECOMMENDATION THAT WAS ESTABLISHED AS A CONSEQUENCE OF DISCUSSIONS BETWEENTHEWHITE HOUSE, THE STATE DEPARTMENT, THE PENTAGON, AND OTHER APPROPRIATE AGENCIES OF THE US GOVERNMENT.

Q. WHEN WAS THAT ESTABLISHED?

A. IT WAS ESTABLISHED IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE RAID.

Q. DOES IT HAVE A TARGET DATE FOR ITS REPORT?

A. NOT AS FAR AS I AM AWARE.

Q. CAN ONE ASSUME THAT NOT UNTIL THAT REVIEW IF COMPLETED THE F-16S WILL BE SHIPPED OR NOT SHIPPED?

A. I DON'T THINK I'D WANT TO NECESSARILY LINK THE TWO.

IN THE FIRST PLACE, I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE TO COMPLETE THE REVIEW; AND THE SECOND PLACE, WE HAVE SAID ON THE RECORD AND I WILL REPEAT--THAT THE SHIPMENT OF THE F-16S REMAIN IN ABEYANCE FOR THE TIME BEING.

Q. YES, BUT THE ORIGINAL LETTER SAID "WHILE THE REVIEW IS BEING COMPLETED, THE SHIPMENT OF THE F-16S IS IN ABEYANCE."

A. I'LL HAVE TO TAKE A LOOK BUT I'M NOT SURE THAT THAT WAS PRECISELY THE LANGAUGE USED.

Q. THE LANGUAGE IS AMBIGOUS, ADMITTEDLY BUT THERE ARE TWO TIME FRAMES THERE, ONE FOR THE TIME BEING AND ONE THAT BEGINS "WHILE THIS REVIEW IS UNDER WAY."

A. "WHILE OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH ISRAEL CONTINUE" AND "WHILE YOUR COMMITTEE IS CONSIDERING THE MATTER," THE PRESIDENT HAS DIRECTED THE SUSPENSION. THE REMARK ABOUT THE REVIEW IS IN THE PRECEDING PARAGRAPH, AND IS NOT LINKED TO THE SUSPENSION OF THE F-16 DELIVERY--IS NOT LINKED."

Q. NONE OF THE OFFICIAL STATEMENTS ISSUED BY ANY AGENCY OF THIS GOVERNMENT HAVE MENTIONED THE ALLEGED EXISTENCE OF THE SECRET BOMB FACTORY UNDERNEATH THIS REACTOR. IT WAS NOT MENTIONED INTHELETTER OR ANYWHERE ELSE, EVEN WHEN IT IS ATTEMPTED TO INCLUDE THAT EITHER THE USG WAS INFORMED AFTER THOSE STATEMENTS WERE MADE ABOUT THE ALLEGATION OF FACT OR THERE IS SOME DOUBT ABOUT ITS VERACITY. COULD YOU COMMENT ON THAT?

A. THE ASSERTION THAT SOME SORT OF FACTORY-EXISTED UNDERNEATH THE REACTOR IS AN ASSERTION THAT EMINATES FROM ISRAEL. I'VE SEEN IT ONLY IN REPORTS THAT COME FROM ISRAEL. I HAVEN'T SEEN IT IN ANY REPORTS COMING FROM HERE.

Q. WHEN YOU SAY THE ASSERTION EMINATES FROM ISRAEL AND NOT FROM REPORTS HERE, ARE YOU REFERRING TO PUBLIC REPORTS OF STATEMENTS BY PRIME MINISTER BEGIN?

A. YES.

Q. ARE WE, THEN, TO CONCLUDE THAT IT HAS NOT BEEN MENTIONED IN THE PRIVATE ISRAELI REPORTS ON THE RAID?

A. YOU'RE WELCOME TO DRAW AN INFERENCE. I'M NOT IN A POSITION TO GO INTO THEIR EXCHANGES WITH US. WHAT

MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE BEEN IN THE PARTICULAR SITE IS JUST SOMETHING THAT I'M NOT IN A POSITION TO PROBE.

Q. I'M NOT PROBING WHAT WAS IN THE SITE, BUT MERELY YOUR STATEMENT AS TO WHERE THE ADMINISTRATION HAS GAINED KNOWLEDGE OF THE REPORTS.

A. THERE IS NOTHING THAT I CAN DEAL WITH. I WOULD POINT THAT OUR CONDEMNATION WAS OF THE RAID, NOT WHAT THEY BOMBED.

Q. I DON'T SEE HOW YOU CAN REALLY HIDE FOREVER BEHIND INTELLIGENCE MATTERS ON WHETHER THERE WAS A FACTORY OR NOT. IF THERE WAS A FACTORY, IT'S A VIOLATION OF THE NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY, OF WHICH IRAQ IS A SIGNATORY AND YOU ARE A DEPOSITORY.

A. I THINK WE'VE ACTUALLY ADRESSED THAT. HAVEN'T WE? I THOUGHT WE SAID WE HAD NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THEY WERE VIOLATING THE NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY.

Q. AND YOU STILL TODAY HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THEM?

A. AT LEAST AT THIS STAGE, I DON'T.

IRAQ IS A PARTY TO THE NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY AND HAS UNDERTAKEN TO ACCEPT IAEA SAFEGUARDS ON ALL ITS NUCLEAR ACTIVITIES. WE HAVE HAD NO EVIDENCE THAT IRAQ HAD VIOLATED ITS COMMITMENTS UNDER THIS TREATY.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY REACTION OR COMMENT ON WHAT BEGIN SAID YESTERDAY THAT THE SYRIAN MISSILES WOULD NOT BE MUCH LONGER IN LEBANON?
A. I DON'T HAVE ANY COMMENT ON IT BUT THINK IT'S PROBABLY USEFUL TO REFER BACK TO SOME OF THE REMARKS THAT WERE MADE YESTERDAY BY, I BELIEVE, THEPRESIDENT, OR AT LEAST THAT I HEARD ASCRIBED TO THE PRESIDENT, THAT THE RECENT EVENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST SUGGEST STRONGLY THE NEED TO URGENTLY ONCE AGAIN TURN OUR ATTENTION TO THE PEACE PROCESS ITSELF.

THE PRESIDENT SAID: "MAY I SUGGEST THAT FOR ALL OF US THIS TRAGEDY HAS BEEN BORN OUT OF THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, BORN OF HOSTILITY. THIS SHOULD BRING TO ALL OF US A SENSE OF IMPORTANCE IN SETTLING, IN THE SHORT RUN THE MATTERS IN LEBANON AND THEN MOVE TO PEACE FOR THE ENTIRE REGION SO THAT BORDERS CAN BE SECURE. WE WANT TO MOVE TO PEACE," HE SAID. AND HE ADDED--
AND THIS WAS IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE FIVE ARAB AMBASSADORS WHO CALLED ON HIM?

"WE WANT TO WORK WITH YOU. WE WANT TO HAVE A JUST AND FAIR PEACE."

I THINK THE POINT IS THAT ALL COUNTRIES NEED TO ONCE AGAIN TURN THEIR ATTENTION TO THE URGENT NEED TO PURSUE THE PEACE PROCESS IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

Q. WE KEEP SEEING REPORTS THAT SYRIA IS HARDENING ITS POSITION AND THAT OFFICIALS HERE UNDER HAVE BEEN EXPRESSING GLOOM AND DOOM ABOUT THE HABIB MISSION. WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT IT TODAY?

A. AS FAR AS I KNOW, THERE HAS NOT BEEN. STOESSEL